

The scene takes place in a hatchery where humans are artificially mass-created and conditioned to become one of the social classes in England: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon. Alpha people have the best places in society whereas Epsilon people can only do basic and degrading tasks.

A SQUAT grey building of only thirty-four stories.¹ Over the main entrance the words, **CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY² AND CONDITIONING CENTRE**, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, **COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY**. The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared³ through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly⁴ shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work tables.

The Director and his students stepped into the nearest lift and were carried up to the fifth floor. **INFANT NURSERIES. NEO-PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING ROOMS**, announced the notice board.

The Director opened a door. They were in a large bare room, very bright and sunny; for the whole of the southern wall was a single window. Half a dozen nurses, trousered and jacketed in the regulation white viscose-linen uniform, their hair aseptically hidden under white caps, were engaged in⁵ setting out bowls of roses in a long row across the floor. Big bowls, packed tight with blossom⁶. Thousands of petals, ripe-blown and silkily smooth, like the cheeks of innumerable little cherubs. The nurses stiffened to attention as the D.H.C. came in.

"Set out the books," he said curtly.

In silence the nurses obeyed his command. Between the rose bowls the books were duly set out—a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird.

"Now bring in the children."

¹ Floors

² A place where you incubate embryos or eggs

³ Light with a strong light

⁴ Without colour

⁵ Were busy

⁶ Full of flowers

They hurried out of the room and returned in a minute or two, each pushing a kind of tall dumb-waiter laden, on all its four wire-netted shelves, with eight-month-old babies, all exactly alike (a Bokanovsky⁷ Group, it was evident) and all (since their caste was Delta) dressed in khaki.

"Put them down on the floor."

The infants were unloaded.

"Now turn them so that they can see the flowers and books."

Turned, the babies at once fell silent, then began to crawl⁸ towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new and profound significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of the crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles and twitterings of pleasure.

The Director rubbed his hands. "Excellent!" he said. "It might almost have been done on purpose."

The swiftest⁹ crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetaling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. Then, "Watch carefully," he said. And, lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever.

There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded.

The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

"And now," the Director shouted (for the noise was deafening), "now we proceed to rub in¹⁰ the lesson with a mild¹¹ electric shock."

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance¹². Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily¹³ as if to the tug of unseen wires¹⁴.

⁷ A process which allows to hatch 90 clone babies from a single egg

⁸ To walk on all four

⁹ Quickest

¹⁰ To make somebody assimilate something

¹¹ Not too hard

¹² *qui s'échappaient maintenant de leur bouche*

¹³ With sudden motions

¹⁴ As puppet limbs

"We can electrify that whole strip of floor," bawled the Director in explanation. "But that's enough," he signalled to the nurse.

The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror.

"Offer them the flowers and the books again."

The nurses obeyed; but at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away¹⁵ in horror, the volume of their howling suddenly increased.

"Observe," said the Director triumphantly, "observe."

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder¹⁶.

"They'll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an 'instinctive' hatred of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They'll be safe from books and botany all their lives." The Director turned to his nurses. "Take them away again."

Still yelling¹⁷, the khaki babies were loaded on to their dumb-waiters and wheeled out, leaving behind them the smell of sour milk and a most welcome silence.

One of the students held up his hand... well, he couldn't understand about the flowers. Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Patiently the D.H.C. explained. If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of¹⁸ high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport.

"And didn't they consume transport?" asked the student.

"Quite a lot," the D.H.C. replied. "But nothing else."

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature,

but not the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they hated it.

"We condition the masses to hate the country," concluded the Director. "But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail¹⁹ the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks."

"I see," said the student, and was silent, lost in admiration.

Brave New World, by Aldous Huxley

Reading Guide

- Compare the description of the environment with the one of flowers and books (focus on adjectives). What feeling is created?
- How are flowers and books presented to the babies? Why? Explain the word "pavlovian"
- What common points can you pick up between this excerpt and the one from 1984. What is different?
- Explain an individual's creation in this world.

¹⁵ *Se reculèrent*

¹⁶ Separate

¹⁷ Crying

¹⁸ Because of

¹⁹ Necessitate